Higher Education Quality Assessment : Approaches and Tools

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Objectives

- Consider quality assessment as a component of quality assurance
- Describe approaches to quality assessment and assurance used in the UK
- Identify tools for effective quality assessment and quality assurance

What are we talking about?

What is similar?

- Assessment, review, evaluation, inspection
  - all use similar processes
- It is the focus and frame of reference that vary
- Assessment v Assurance

Some key tools

- Common criteria –a quality framework
- Self-evaluation/self assessment
- Evidence eg data, external reports
- Review engagements
- Involvement of peers
- Involvement of stakeholders
- Published findings
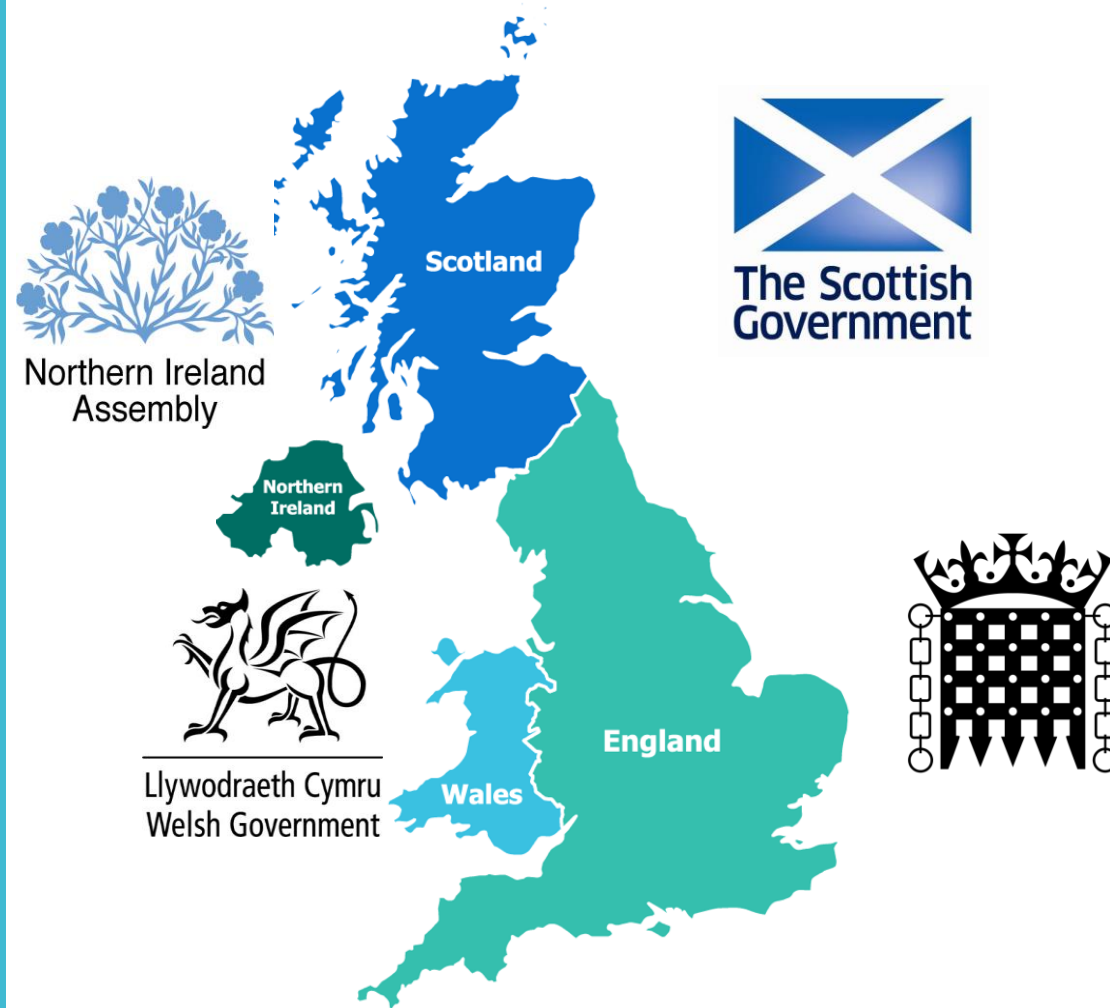
Quality framework

- 'Clear criteria against which the efficacy of an institution's management of standards and quality can be measured'

- 'Criteria shared across, and used by, all Higher Education institutions'

For example - In the UK –The Quality Code and The Qualification and Credit Framework

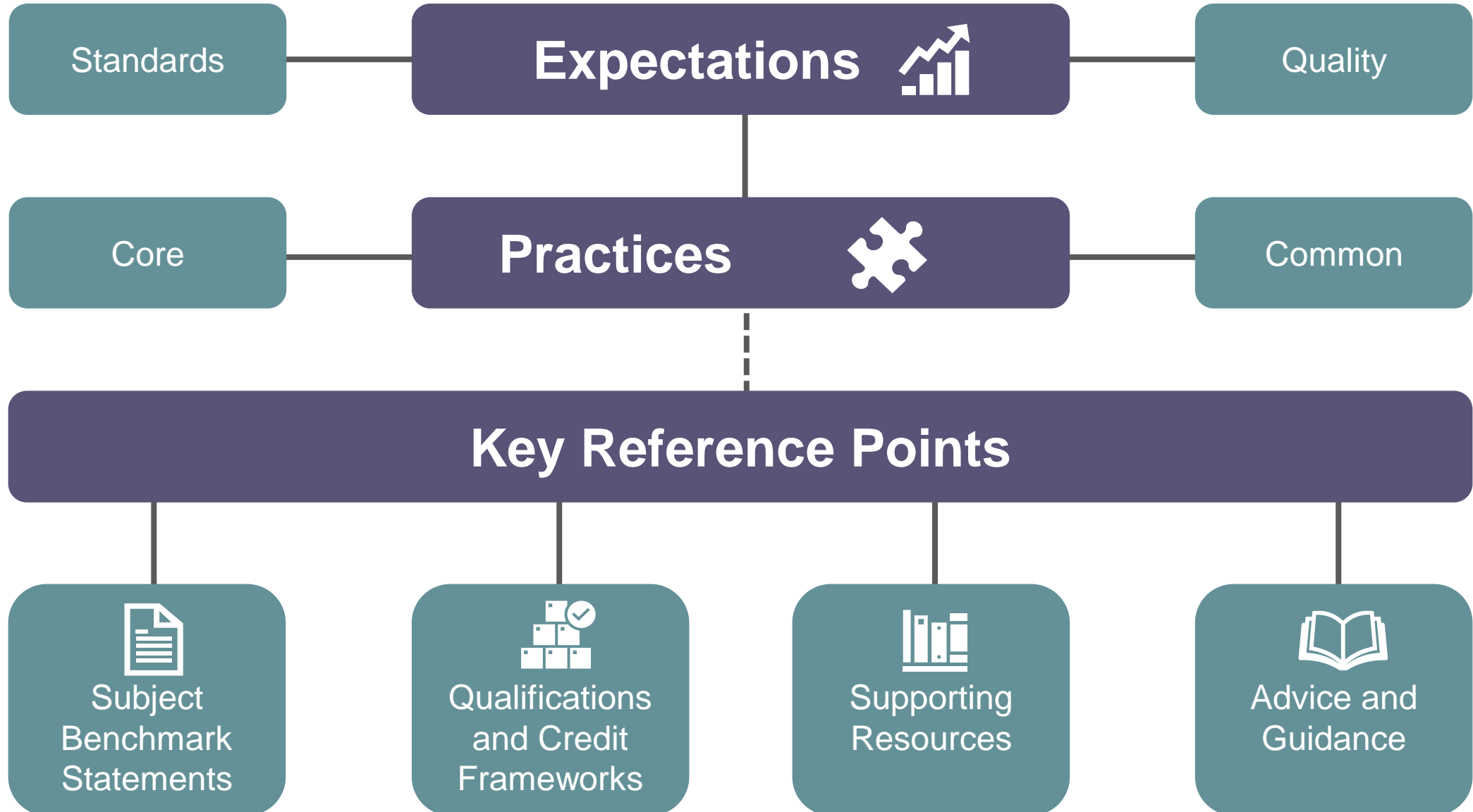# The interconnected system of UK quality systems

Key values:

- a commitment to excellence
- internal quality assurance procedures
- external quality assurance arrangements when required
- student involvement and engagement
- public information (on provision, quality, learning and teaching arrangements)
- scrutiny of powers to award degrees.

The interconnected system of quality
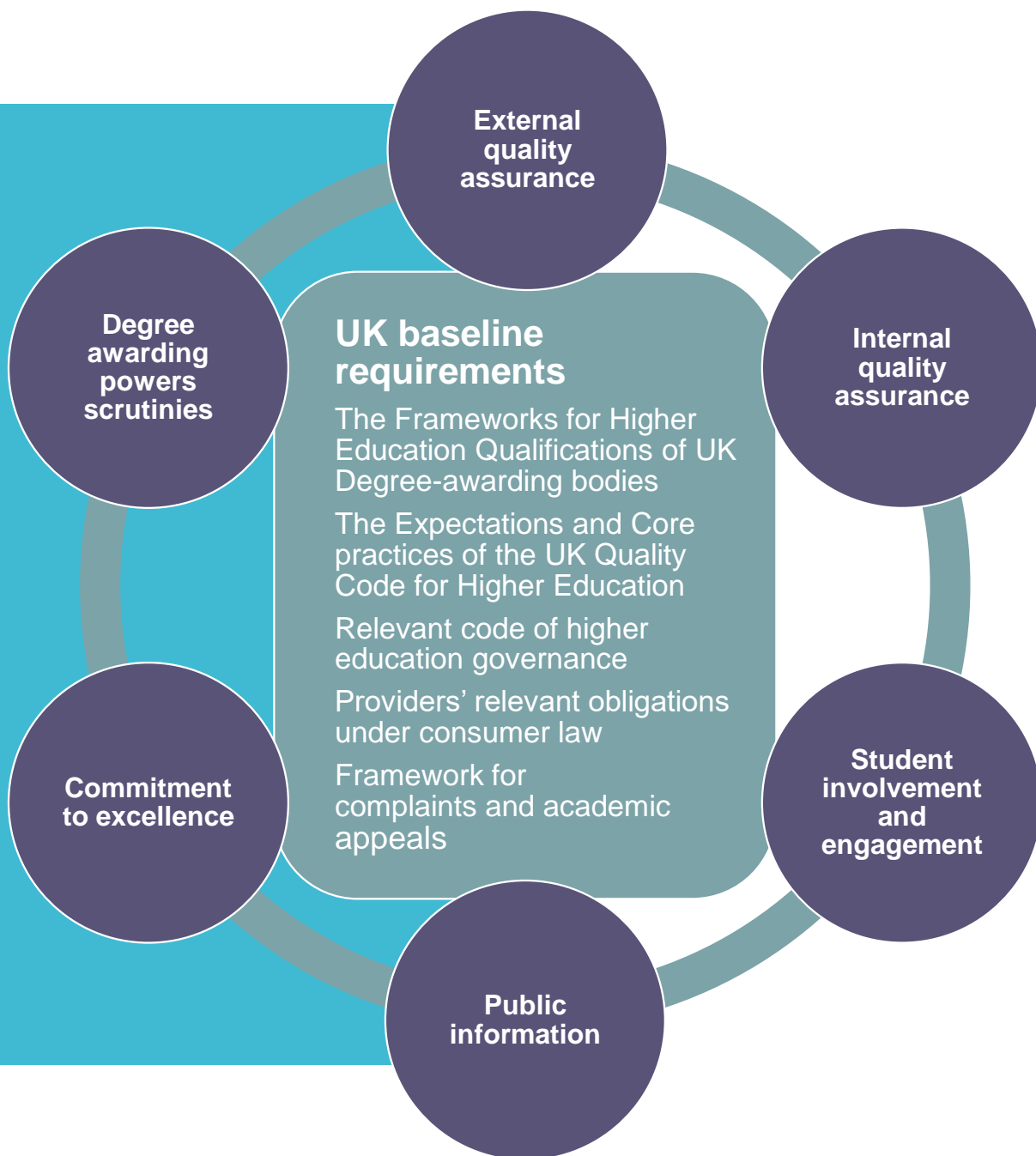
- Integrated
- Interconnected
- Coherent
- Student-centred
- Internationally respected
- Effective
- Responsive

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Standards —— **Expectations** —— Quality

Core —— **Practices** —— Common

Key Reference Points

Subject Benchmark Statements

Qualifications and Credit Frameworks

Supporting Resources

Advice and Guidance

Self evaluation

- Gives an overview of the institution, including its track record in managing quality and standards

- Describes its approach to assuring the academic standards and quality of that provision

- Explains how the institution knows that their approach is effective in meeting quality criteria, and how this could be further improved.

How does self-evaluation enable improvement?

- Enables person, course team, project and institution to reflect on what they have done

- Enables them to think about what they might do next

- Enables them to think about how they might do it better

Questions for a self-evaluation

- What are you trying to do and why are you trying to do it?

- How are you doing it?

- Why are you doing it that way?

- Why is that the best way of doing it?

- How do you know it works?

- How can you demonstrate that it is working?

- How could you do it better?

Adapted from:

The Result of Intelligent Effort? Two Decades in the Quality Assurance of Higher Education
(Peter Williams, IoE, 2009)

Evidence

For example:
- accreditation reports
- external examiner reports
- evidence of employer engagement
- evaluations from stakeholders
- assessed student work
- student course evaluations
- reliable data
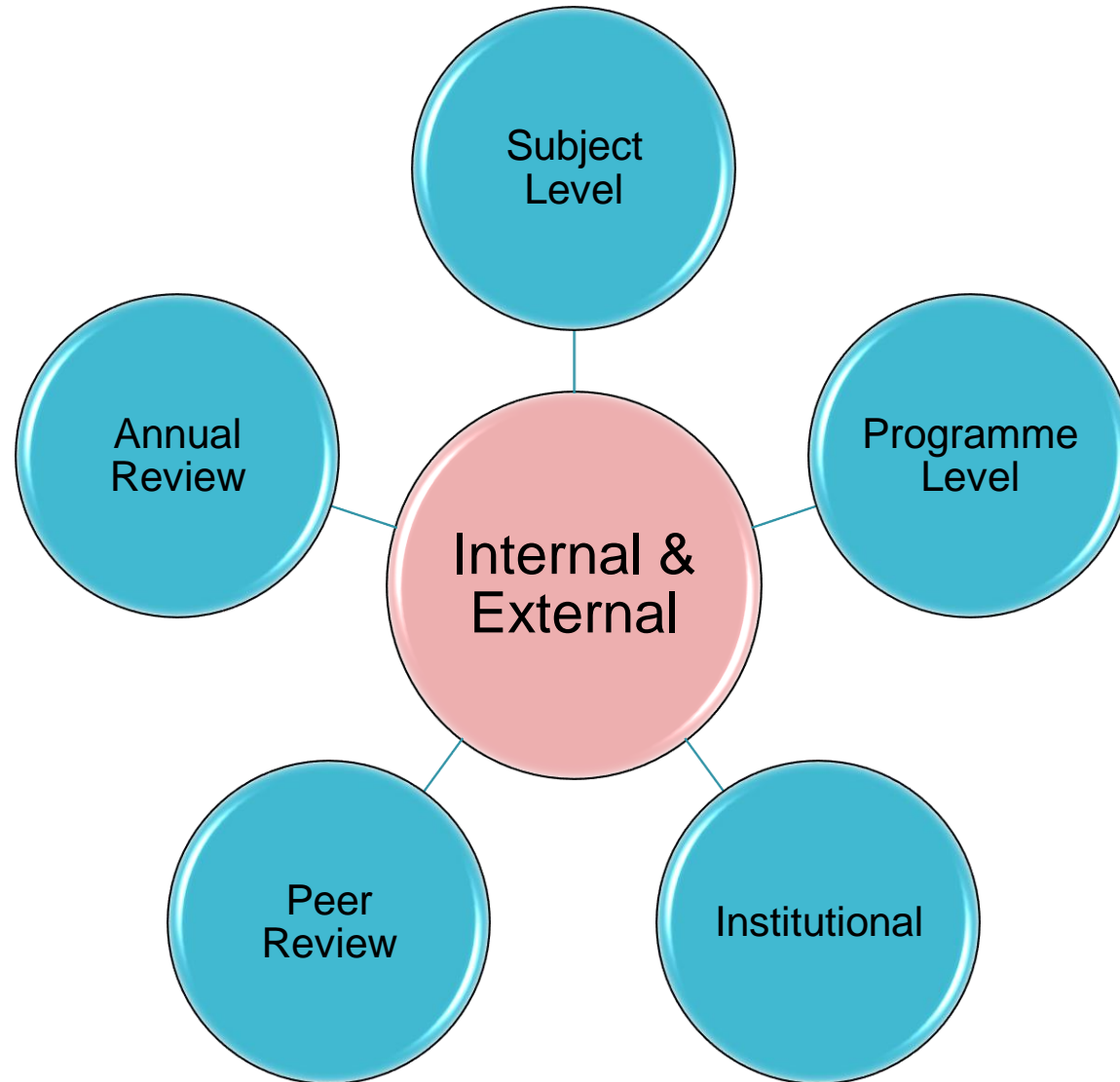- module guidelines
- student handbooks

Data

- Admissions metrics
- Engagement metrics
- Grades
- Attendance information
- Examinations
- Surveys – for example in the UK – National Student Survey

Reviews

- look at how well providers of higher education maintain academic standards and quality

Basic process

Evidence ➡ Analysis ➡ Review visit ➡ Report ➡ Action plan

Common features

- Self-evaluation and provider responsibility
- Involvement of peers
- Use of evidence
- Focus on outcomes
- Published findings

Some reasons…

- To meet the requirements of an external professional   body or quality assurance agency

- To check that the teaching, facilities, resources and support provide for a good student experience

- To confirm that the learning opportunities collectively   allow students to achieve and demonstrate attainment of the learning outcomes

- To maintain an institution's reputation and good standing

Reviews are carried out….

- Positively
- Evidence-based and objective
- Conducted in the context of the institution's mission
- and ethos
- Conducted within the agreed scope of the review
- Carried out with reference to the relevant standards
- and benchmarks
- Methodology applied consistently and with care
- Transparent
- Not based on preconceived ideas

What is needed for a successful review?

- Willing stakeholders
- Move away from 'them' and 'us'
- Supportive approach
- Ongoing relationship
- Sharing - good practice and lessons learnt
- Training

Peers

Peers have relevant experience in the higher education sector

For example – in the UK – in the IQR method:

- Three experienced and fully trained peer reviewers trained and appointed by QAA:
  - one from a UK university or college
  - one from a non-UK institution
  - one student.

Co-owners of quality in higher education?

- The sector
- Regulatory bodies
- Universities and colleges
- Academic faculty
- Administrative staff
- Students
- Others?

Stakeholders' Perceptions of Quality

- Stakeholders are a group or individuals who are affected by or can affect the achievement of a higher education institution (source: Freeman)

- Depending on their position or involvement stage, stakeholders could be also either internal or external to an institution

- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations stakeholders and society.

Stakeholders in quality in higher education – examples

- Students
- Alumini
- Employers
- Higher education sector
- Universities and colleges
- Staff – Academic faculty and administrative
- Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Degrees of student involvement in Quality assessment

Consultation:

Opportunities are provided for students to express individual opinions, perspectives, experiences, ideas and concerns

Involvement:

Opportunities are provided for students as individuals to take a more active role.

Participation:

Decisions are taken by students to take part or take a more active role in defined activity.

Partnership:

There is a collaboration between an institution/faculty/department and student, involving joint ownership and decision making over both the process and outcome.

Published findings

- Openness
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Public information

League tables

Pros:

- provide key public information to inform choice
- quantify an Institution's strategic ambition and/or measure their performance
- give a sense of the diversity of provision

Cons:

- based on limited analysis of data
- disregard context
- can compare the incomparable

League tables - thoughts

- **Don't:**
- Change your institution's mission to conform with rankings;
- Use rankings as the only/primary set of indicators to frame goals or assess performance;
- Use rankings to inform policy or resource allocation decisions;
- Manipulate public information and data in order to rise in the rankings.

- **Do:**
- Ensure your university has an appropriate/realistic strategy and performance framework;
- Use rankings only as part of an overall quality assurance, assessment or benchmarking system;
- Be accountable and provide good quality public information about learning outcomes, impact and benefit to students and society;
- Engage in an information campaign to broaden media and public understanding of the limitations of rankings

(ELLEN HAZELKORN 2019)

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Thank you!

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